

Department of Corrections

1. What are your thoughts on the question of whether news cameras and reporters' recording devices should be allowed in state prisons?

I concur with the Department's policy which is very specific that news media representatives have no more or less rights to contact, or be contacted by, offenders in correctional facilities than do members of the public. As such, all visitors wishing to visit with prisoners in correctional facilities are required to follow the same procedure in filling out a visitor application and having their name placed on the prisoner's approved visitors list at the prisoner's request.

A prisoner in a Correctional Facilities Administration (CFA) facility may have visits, including with a news media representative, in accordance with the Department's visiting policy. On a visit with a prisoner in a CFA facility, news media representatives are permitted to bring writing materials. However, news media representatives (or any other visitor) are not permitted to use or possess a camera or other audio or visual recording device while on the visit.

Policy also permits news media access inside prisons, for other than a prisoner interview, with approval of the Director or designee if it is determined that such access would not be disruptive to the prisoner population or institutional operations.

2. What type of limits do you feel are appropriate with the media when it comes to prisoner interviews?

Allowing news media representatives free access to prison facilities would pose a range of problems for the Department and its staff who would be in charge of overseeing such visits. First, there exists a security concern with allowing the introduction of cameras and recording devices into prisons. Each person, including their equipment would need to be thoroughly searched. This requires a great deal of staff time which means that staff is unable to provide custody coverage for the prisoners if they are searching news media equipment. Next, cameras inside the prison undoubtedly draw the attention of prisoners. I have concerns about having news media representatives coming to a facility to feature a particular prisoner. This not only gives unneeded notoriety to the particular prisoner among other prisoners, but, more importantly is a great disservice to the crime victims who are once again victimized when they turn on the evening news to see this person in their living room.

3. How will you plan on dealing with the reality that the Department is near its prisoner bed space capacity?

The Department has prepared and is implementing a five year action plan to address the issue with the objective of not having to build new prisons.

Expanding the use of community sanctions for low-level offenders and technical parole violators earlier this year has already resulted in reduced prison intake. Two programs contained in our FY 2004 appropriations bill will further reduce our prison bed needs for both men and women. The

Local Facility Housing Fund, initially conceived by the Michigan Sheriffs' Association and supported by the Administration, and the modified Conditional Reintegration Program, developed with the support of the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, will also assist in reserving expensive prison beds for the most violent and assaultive offenders.

4. How do you feel about the current compensation rate for DOC employees (too high, too low, or just right)?

First, the majority of staff within the Department is represented by various bargaining units who negotiate with the Office of the State Employer for their wages. However, in comparing what MDOC staff earns with other state departments of correction, I would say MDOC salaries are appropriate.

5. What are your thoughts on the effectiveness of community corrections? Is a more aggressive community corrections program necessary due to the state's prison capacity being reached? If so, how do you envision that being implemented?

Community corrections is a viable and cost effective alternative to prison commitment, and as described above, it is an integral component of the Department's Five Year Plan. A more aggressive community corrections program is necessary if we are to achieve the successes outlined in that Plan. Treatment is a good alternative where appropriate. The use of treatment centers in lieu of prison for both new commitments and parole and probation violators is a worthy goal and can be an effective use of resources.

Michigan's prison commitment rate has decreased from 32% in 1990 to 26% in 2000. Approximately 80% of the felony offenders are currently being sentenced to community-based sanctions and services. The reduction in the prison commitment rates and an increased use of local sentencing options can be attributed in part to the efforts of local jurisdictions to expand the range of available sentencing options and to concentrate on reducing or maintaining low prison admissions.

6. What efforts will you make to ensure that the successes or failures of community corrections are measured using objective uniform statistics statewide?

The Office of Community Corrections is in the process of enhancing the capability of measuring and monitoring the success and failure of community corrections funded programs, both at the county and the statewide level. The community corrections funding application is being modified to track the reporting categories in our data systems to monitor the effectiveness of community corrections programs. Efforts are also underway to ensure that standard methods are used within and outside the department to analyze program effectiveness.

7. What benefits do you see in locating probation centers in residential neighborhoods?

For those offenders who need it, probation residential centers provide a more structured environment than home placement. Providing a location that does not immediately put up road blocks to success on probation is the primary benefit of locating probation centers in residential neighborhoods. These types of locations should provide good access to public transportation, which enables the offender to

be able to get to job interviews, work and other appointments. This type of location should also be in close proximity to a variety of employment opportunities for unemployed probationers. Because of their setting in neighborhoods, community involvement and input is important and the lines of communication should be open between community leaders and residents and those running probation residential centers.

8. Given that the prison system is reaching its maximum capacity at the same time that the state is facing a billion dollar budget deficit, does the privatization of new prison facilities become a more desirable alternative?

Clearly, the Administration has expressed opposition to additional privatization of prisons. In the instance where that has occurred in other states, the outcomes have not always been positive. Many privately operated prisons in other states have experienced problems involving prisoner assaults and deaths, staffing levels and high turnover, the qualifications and appropriate training of employees and prison disturbances. I do not support the expansion of privately operated prisons in Michigan.

9. What type of extracurricular prison activities do you think the state should pay for (college classes, cable TV, air conditioning, weight training)?

Generally, the State does not pay for any of the above mentioned activities for prisoners. Each prison facility has what is known as a "Prisoner Benefit Fund" that can decide whether to pay for things such as cable television in the day rooms; recreational equipment, which includes weight equipment, basketballs, footballs; and picnic tables, etc. Money that goes into the Prisoner Benefit Fund is generated primarily from profits from the prisoner store (where prisoners are permitted to use their own money to buy selected items for their personal use). Prisoners within each institution vote on how monies derived from the Prisoner Benefit Fund are spent. With regard to college programming for prisoners, prisoners are permitted to enroll in correspondence courses at their own expense. The primary focus of the Department's education program is GED preparation. Since state funded college programming is not available for the general public, I do not feel it should be made available to prisoners at state expense.

10. Given the recent tragic murder of a woman and her daughters in Pontiac by a recently released drug offender, how does the Department plan to change its administration of the early release program to ensure that similar events do not occur in the future? In addition, how does the Department plan to work better with the Parole Board to ensure that similar tragedies do not occur?

The Department does not operate an "early release program." The offender in the Pontiac case was statutorily eligible for parole and the Parole Board granted parole within their legal authority.

Pursuant to statute, the Parole Board makes use of parole guidelines to assist them in their parole decisions. These guidelines consider, among other factors, the nature of the offense resulting in the prison sentence, prior criminal record, institutional conduct and program involvement. One of the Department's long term priorities contained in our "Five Year Plan to Control Prison Growth" is to improve parole guidelines so that the most sophisticated methods available are used to predict community success and improve efforts to prepare inmates for eventual release. To implement this

priority, the Department has applied for and received a technical assistance grant from the National Institute of Corrections - United States Department of Justice - to review our parole guidelines and make recommendations on improvement.

11. Recently, the United States Supreme Court upheld Michigan's strict prison visitation rules. Does the Department plan any changes to their administration of these rules in light of the Supreme Court's action?

The administrative rule changes regarding prisoner visits made in 1995 were done to increase the safety of staff, prisoners and their visitors, as well as to clarify that visits are not a right but a privilege. I firmly believed this was appropriate corrections policy then, and remains so today and am pleased the United States Supreme Court concurs in corrections professionals being the ones to best make such public and institutional policy decisions. Our plan is to return to full implementation of the 1995 visitation rules.

12. Is it the position of the Granholm Administration that the Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth Township should be expanded by 400 beds? [If not, then where would the Administration seek to expand the needed bed space?]

The Administration does support the addition of a 400 bed minimum security housing unit on the existing grounds of the Robert Scott Correctional Facility and included this recommendation in SB 540. The Department has initiated discussions with area legislators and local officials to address their questions and concerns.

13. How does the Department plan to deal with the growing number of female offenders? Will it continue to house them almost exclusively in western Wayne County?

The Department is taking a number of steps, many with legislative support, to address the growing prison population. As described in the response to question #3, the Department's "Five Year Plan to Control Prison Growth" contains a number of both current fiscal year and longer term priorities, which if implemented, will slow the growth of both the male and female prisoner population.

These steps alone should push the projected "run out of prison beds" date into early 2005 from the originally projected timeframe of early 2003. Adoption of longer term initiatives, such as expansion of drug courts and revisions to sentencing guidelines, has the potential of moving this date even further into the future.

As it pertains to the housing of female prisoners, the Administration has recommended the addition of a 400 bed minimum security housing unit to the existing Robert Scott Correctional Facility at a cost of \$4.8 million rather than recommend construction of an entire new prison for women.